

22 - Answering Questions to Problems

by Ben Torrey

Ben Torrey discusses the critical need for understanding North Korea to effectively share the Gospel amidst cultural and ideological barriers.

Duration: 9:26

Scripture: Romans 10:14

Topics: "Problems"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on a missionary's encounter in North Korea and the importance of understanding the culture and beliefs of the people. The missionary unintentionally offended a man by criticizing the leader he thanked for the gifts he received. This caused the man to close up and hindered any opportunity for the missionary to share the gospel with him. The speaker emphasizes the need for research and education about North Korea to be prepared for the day when Christians can freely travel there and share the love of Jesus Christ.

Transcript

Hello. Ben Torrey back again for our weekly chat. I trust that you are enjoying them.

Over the past two weeks I have been sharing about my recent trip to North Korea and some reflections on that experience. You may remember my comment a couple times that I wish I knew the answer to different questions that came up in my mind. Tonight I would like to talk about answering those questions and how important that is.

We at the Fourth River Project and the Three Seas Training Center are preparing for the opening of North Korea through research and education. We have an urgency to be ready for the day that Christian men and women are free to travel in the North and share the love of Jesus Christ. However, as much as we look forward to that day and pray it comes soon, we are concerned about what will happen if we are not prepared.

The gulf of understanding between North and South Korea is much greater than most people realize. In addition to the language gap about which I have spoken in the past, there are also enormous differences in many assumptions about life, the world, Korea, and so on. Similar words and terms have different meanings in the North and the South.

Our great concern is that when we want to share the Gospel, we may think that we are communicating it, but our North Korean brethren will hear something very different from what we intend. This is always a challenge in any cross-cultural mission. Mission agencies, missionaries, and missiologists are all aware of these dynamics in world missions.

The problem is that not many people here in Korea think about this in relation to the North. After all, we are the same people and have the same language. There is no great gap.

Unfortunately, that is not true. Here is a small example of what might happen. By and large, North Koreans are a very religious people.

What, you say? Aren't they atheists? According to the ideology, they are. But the ideology of Juche has been turned itself into a religion centered around the deity of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il. Kim Il-sung is with us eternally.

Long live Comrade Kim Il-sung, the great son of all people. Long live Comrade General Kim Jong-il, the great son of the 21st century. That his son, as in S-U-N.

You see these and other such slogans all over the country. People are indoctrinated in this religion from infancy up. Well, a missionary in Manchuria met a North Korean who had just fled the land because he was starving.

When he crossed the river, this missionary met him. They struck up a conversation. The North Korean was friendly and seemed quite relieved to run into someone who was concerned for his safety.

His face was quite open as they conversed. After a while, the missionary gave him some food and clothes. Without thinking, the man instinctively gave thanks to the great leader for the gifts that he had received.

In other words, he automatically said his grace. This made the missionary quite angry, and he began to berate the man for thanking a leader who is causing the people to starve, especially for things that were sent from America because of the love of Jesus Christ. As he spoke sharply, he saw the man's face close up, and he wished that he could take back his words, but it was too late.

He had blasphemed that man's God and lost any chance of befriending him or sharing the true gospel with him. An unexpected reaction and a thoughtless word had erected a barrier to the gospel rather than open the door. I doubt that that missionary will ever make that mistake again, but the cost of that lesson was much too high.

Our job at the Fourth River Project is to teach these lessons at a lesser price before it is too late. In order to teach these things, we need to have a much better understanding of North Korea than we currently have, thus my comments on wishing that I understood something or other better. The only way to gain this knowledge is through experience and research.

Not that many people have the opportunity to gain the experience, but there are some who do, nor is everyone qualified to be a knowledgeable researcher. However, we are able to take the knowledge from those who do gain the experience or do the research and use it to educate others. This is what we are doing.

As we put on North Korea schools or work camp schools in the summer, we always bring in those who have experience working in North Korea or with North Koreans. We also always include those who have lived and grown up in North Korea. Their experience is invaluable.

In addition to tapping the knowledge of those with actual experience, we also look to the results of research to fill out the picture. We are doing what we can to encourage people to research North Korea, and we are endeavoring to bring together the fruits of that research. I am a great believer in synergy, the benefit that comes when two people or ideas mesh so that the result is greater than the simple sum of the two.

One plus one equals not two, but something greater. This is synergy. This is also something that God does all the time.

In this instance, it is what happens when a researcher in one discipline, let us say public health, learns what a researcher in a different discipline, say economics, has found out. All of a sudden, the public health researcher realizes that the particular situation he is researching is the result of economic issues, and the economist gains the insight that the public health problem is a major factor in the economic problem he is researching. Together, as they share their knowledge across discipline, they both come to a greater and Then someone else who is absorbing this new knowledge understands how it relates to sharing the love of Christ.

I am always looking for opportunities to encourage people to do good, solid research about North Korea, even with all the very real difficulties that face us in doing that in this current situation. Let me read you an excerpt from a document on our website, www.thefourthriver.org. That's The Fourth River, all spelled out. It's about research.

The following is a list of some questions and topics. They are important in that they meet one or more of the following criteria. Provide a deeper understanding of the land of North Korea and its people.

Look into the history of Korea, especially the North, in order to provide a deeper understanding of what led to the present situation. Explore the theories, techniques, and strategies that will serve to rebuild North Korea as a righteous nation with a biblical worldview. This includes economics, social norms, culture, legal institutions, government structures, schools, etc.

Explore these theories, techniques, and strategies for propagating the gospel throughout North Korea so as to bring about genuine conversion of individuals, families, communities, and the nation as a whole, and the establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ throughout the land. This list is intended as a start in exploring the field. One subject, ideology and religion.

The impact of Juche on the people of North Korea. The rise and nature of atheistic state religion in North Korea. Similarities and differences between the Choson era, Neo-Confucian hermit kingdom state, and the modern, North Korean, Juche-based state.

The enduring legacy of communism, Juche, and totalitarianism on such things as the nation's physical infrastructure, quality control, general attitudes towards property, private and public, towards profession and labor, towards research, towards risk, political experimentation, exploration. Another subject, moral and ethical assumptions, imperatives in North Korean culture. What are social and moral questions current among North Koreans' intellectuals? To what extent do traditional Korean religion and philosophy

continue in the North, and how are they integrated into the popular life and thought? Confucianism, Buddhism, shamanism.

How extensive is the survival of Christianity in the North, both official and underground? And to what extent do Christian ideas continue in popular life and thought? Ideal biblical, legal, and economic policies, procedures, and institutions for the rebuilding of North Korea as a free and godly nation. This is just a small sample of the kinds of questions that we have. The list includes economics, geography, social institutions, education, intellectual development, and so on.

You may not have thought that you might have a job to do in preparing for the opening of North Korea. But God may be calling you to be a researcher in your chosen field. Since we are speaking about a whole nation, there is not a single topic that we can ignore.

Everything has been affected by the history of the past 60 years. No, the past 100 years or more. Whatever you do or study or find interesting, there is probably an aspect of it that relates to North Korea and needs to be researched so that we can gain the knowledge that we need in order to share the joyous, life-giving gospel without hindrance.

Even if you can't do research, you can pray for those who do. Think about it. Good night.

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